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ABSTRACT

This report by the Committee on Library Orientation at the University of Virginia reviews the need for a unified, well designed sign system to assist users of the university libraries and discusses the categories and functions of such signs as identified in the relevant literature. A discussion of the current situation at the university and problem areas revealed by a survey of existing signs leads to recommendations for the development of an improved sign system. Specific recommendations are concerned with the types of signs to be used--orientation, directional, identification (both interior and exterior), conditional and regulatory, instructional and current awareness--and the process of implementation and installation, including services to be provided by a design consultant, priorities for installation, and the provision of an in-house facility for sign production. A list of references and a copy of the survey form for existing signs are attached. (RAA)

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COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY ORIENTATION
REPORT TO THE DIRECTORS COUNCIL
LIBRARY SIGN SYSTEM

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Introduction

The University of Virginia Library system is vast and complex. The Alderman Library houses the general collections. The area libraries contain collections in fine arts, science/technology, and music, and the smaller branch libraries have collections in biology/psychology, chemistry, commerce, education, engineering, environmental sciences, mathematics/astronomy, and physics. In the Fall of 1981, the Clemons Library will open and the collection will include heavily used materials and reserve books. Three independent libraries house separate collections in business administration, law, and medicine.

The library collections include two million books and periodicals, ten million manuscripts, two million government documents, and extensive holdings of maps, records, photographs, slides, and microforms. The Library offers many services including reference, interlibrary loan, orientation programs and tours, special exhibits, and computerized literature searches.

The Library system serves the students, faculty, and staff of the University of Virginia; faculty of other Virginia colleges and universities; adult residents of Charlottesville and Albemarle County; visiting faculty; members of the Virginia State Legislature; and members of the Alumni Association of the University. The libraries serve both as undergraduate and as research facilities.

Because of the physical size and the geographic layout of the Library system; the variety of special services; the variety of people who are served by the Library system; and the constant changes which

occur in locations, procedures, and regulations, a coherent, attractive, and effective sign system is needed. In an effort to address this and other orientation issues, the University Librarian reestablished the Committee on Library Orientation. One of the charges to the Committee was "to recommend signage for the Library system which will foster easier orientation." The goal of a sign system is to minimize reader frustration inherent in the use of a large library system by meeting the following objectives:

--to identify and locate libraries within the University
--to orient users to available resources
--to improve accessibility by directing users to these resources as efficiently as possible
--to identify resources, service areas, and facilities so that they are immediately recognizeable
--to inform users of regulations, hours, and special events
--to provide instructional information as needed
--to notify users of changes and temporary conditions

The University of Virginia Library system needs a unified, well designed sign system which meets these objectives. Many other university libraries have recognized the need for improved graphic communication. Several universities, including Columbia, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Stanford, and Vanderbilt, have begun to design and implement improved library sign systems. Librarians' growing interest in coordinated visual orientation systems is reflected in the recent literature.

The concept of a sign system includes the idea of signs but goes further to include "building directories, wall graphics, printed library

guides, maps of the building, space arrangement, displays, even information stations - in short, all visual means of helping readers find and use the services of a library. To be truly helpful to users, it is crucial that these components be planned and organized as a system." (Pollett, Sign Systems for Libraries, p. ix). To function properly as a system, the "signs must be coordinated in a logical progression, with appropriate degrees of emphasis on different kinds of information. The answer is to present information by an interrelated system that integrates messages and traffic patterns and combines them with the architecture in a visually coordinated sequence." (Pollett, Sign Systems for Libraries, p. 30).

The relevant literature suggests that a system may include the following types of signs:

ORIENTATION - graphic displays which enable the user to orient himself in the physical environment of the library

DIRECTIONAL - signs which provide directional information at decision points

IDENTIFICATION - signs which mark areas, service points, facilities, and rooms

INSTRUCTIONAL - signs which explain library procedures or the use of materials, collections, or equipment

CONDITIONAL AND REGULATORY - signs which regulate behavior or specify library hours or other changeable information

CURRENT AWARENESS - signs which inform users of library events,

exhibits, or short-term changes in library routines

The terminology for signs defined above will be used throughout this report.

Since the first meeting of the Committee on July 28, 1980, the members have been studying the literature on library sign systems in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, as well as the sign situation which presently prevails in the University of Virginia Library system. Visits were made to the following University of Virginia libraries: Alderman, Commerce, Education, Fine Arts, Science/Technology Information Center, and the science branches. Written records of the surveys as well as a selection of books, articles, reports, and photographs are available from the Committee. A sample of the survey form is appended to this report.

The Committee members found in our survey that many of the signs presently used are unreadable, unnoticeable, unclear, unattractive, and inappropriately placed. We discovered numerous points of confusion, unmarked areas, and signs which were out of date and, therefore, no longer necessary. The existing signs do not function together as a system and lack the uniformity of design characteristic of a well planned system. These deficiencies are confirmed in the following section of this report. The final section includes the Committee's recommendations and a implementation plan for a unified sign system for the University of Virginia Library.

Current Situation

Before making its recommendations, the Committee felt it would be useful to review the existing situation with regard to signs in the university library system. Each library was surveyed and our findings are summarized below in two sections: 1) types of signs, and, 2) problems with existing signs.

I. Types of Signs

In this section, the signs that are currently in place are examined and the absence of necessary signs is noted. In each category, only a very few of the possible examples are mentioned.

A. Orientation

Although maps, directories and floor plans are currently used in some library locations, they are often poorly placed and fail to do an adequate job of orienting the user. Within Alderman, there are floor plans and a directory on the kiosk. It is questionable whether these are in the location and style to make them truly effective. In addition, floor plans for each level are located in the stairwells and a general floor plan is located next to each stack elevator. Perhaps the most crucial deficiency is the lack of an effective graphic display of the spatial relationship between floors in Alderman which clearly conveys to the user that he has entered the building on the fourth floor. For most branch libraries located within larger buildings, there are insufficient orienting devices. Furthermore, there is no centrally-located, highly visible map for the Grounds as a whole.

B. Directional

Very few directional signs at "decision points" on major routes are found in the library system. Those which do exist seem to be ineffective. Many staff members reported a large volume of directional questions.

The size and complexity of Alderman's layout, particularly the relationship between old and new sections of the building and the existence of closed stack levels, makes wayfinding extremely difficult. The uninitiated user of Alderman has insufficient guidance in reaching major service points as well as stack locations. And even the frequent user often encounters difficulty in finding an effective route of egress from the stacks.

The primary directional need for the branch libraries is an effective means of directing the user to the library once he has entered the building; currently, this need is not met. Once within the small branch libraries, there is little need for directional guidance. However, the locations of stack levels in both the Science/Technology Information Center and the Fine Arts Library are not readily apparent; these libraries lack effective means of guiding users to the stacks.

C. Identifications

Exterior

In the absence of overall orienting devices such as maps, exterior signs on buildings become particularly necessary. Relatively few of the buildings on the Grounds are identified. Most noticeably, there is no exterior sign for Alderman Library.

Interior

A relatively high number of interior identification signs are already in place in Alderman and in the branch libraries. Some of the problems with the existing signs are examined in Section II below. However, our survey indicated that there are still areas within libraries which are not now identified.

D. Conditional and Regulatory

Most libraries do not have effective means for posting information of a variable nature, such as changes in hours. Such changes are often communicated via hand written notices taped on doorways. Though there are numerous regulatory signs already in place, most librarians indicated a need for additional signs in this category.

E. Instructional

Most instructional signs which currently exist inform users of procedures in a particular library or location. Some of these are in the form of handouts; others are hand-lettered or typed paper signs. At some service points, manufacturer's instruction books serve as the only aids to use.

F. Current Awareness

This category of signs is handled differently by each library in the system. Most rely on ad hoc methods for disseminating information. Some libraries have bulletin boards and others do not. In those libraries which do have bulletin boards, they are usually a catch-all for a variety of notices, many of which are out-of-date or do not pertain to the library at all. In addition, there is no recognizable format for library notices which would call attention to their importance.

II. Problems with Existing Signs

A. No unified graphic scheme; variety of materials and styles

In all categories of signs found throughout the library system, shape, size, color, material and lettering of signs vary widely. Many of the identification signs are "pseudo-walnut," but beyond this, there is little uniformity. This lack of uniformity makes it difficult for the user to recognize library signs and to apprehend their messages. The overall effect is visually confusing.

B. Haphazard placement

Signs are not always placed at the point where they would be most noticeable. Information is frequently presented prior to rather than at major "decision points." Often signs are placed outside the effective field of vision; many are hung well above eye-level and are not large enough to compensate for their placement. Finally, signs are often clustered, overwhelming the user with too much information at once and again creating visual confusion.

C. Inconsistency in wording

In addition to problems in graphic design and placement, the actual wording of signs is extremely inconsistent. Even within one library, some signs are contradictory and confusing. System-wide, this problem becomes even more apparent. The inconsistency is seen in the terminology, tone and character of the messages.

Much of the inconsistency stems from the lack of guidance in formulating signs, but some also results from inconsistencies in actual policies within the library system. For example, circulation policies and

rules concerning food and drink vary from library to library. This question may need to be addressed in conjunction with the Committee's work.

D. Lack of centralized editorial control

The inconsistency in wording noted above is a direct result of the absence of any centralized editorial control over the content of signs. Furthermore, there is no person or group which provides guidance in formulating effective signage.

E. Inadequate method for obtaining signs

For some time, there has been a policy that signs should be requested through one individual. However, this policy has been vaguely understood and little-enforced. There are often long delays in obtaining signs requested through proper channels. Finally, the lack of flexibility in the current sign making equipment makes certain types of signs impossible to produce. All of these factors result in individuals taking the initiative to make hand written or other locally-produced signs, which is a major cause of the problems and inconsistencies noted in Sections A-C above.

The Proposed System

I. Recommendations

The recommended sign system for the University of Virginia Library should orient and guide patrons and should create a visual identity for the library. The sign system should include both interior and exterior signs. Permanent signs, permanent signs with changeable features such

as handouts and change of hours notices should be a part of the unified system. Permanent signs should be of durable and vandal resistant materials. Temporary signs should complement the sign system and be on paper with an easily recognized masthead in order to reinforce the visual identity of the library. To facilitate user access, all signs should be legible, succinct, and consistent in style and form. They should be distinctive, complement the building decor, and be placed only at the most frequently used points in order to avoid information over-load and clutter.

The following signs should be included. They are presented in order of their priority:

A. Orientation

Visual orientation displays should be designed for the lobbies of Alderman and Clemons, and for the area libraries. These displays should immediately convey essential orientation information and the spatial relationship within each library They should be designed for easy updating as conditions and locations change.

B. Directional

Directional signs located at decision-making points should progressively guide users to materials and services. Signs directing the user to a branch library from the main entrance of the building should be installed. Within the larger libraries, signs should direct patrons to the major areas and services.

C. Identification

1. Exterior

Exterior signs should identify libraries which occupy entire buildings. Signs identifying Alderman, Clemons, and Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library should be prominently displayed near or above the main entrance of each building. All other libraries should be identified by a sign at the entrance to the library. Exterior signs would require the approval of the University of Virginia Planning Department. The Committee encourages efforts to obtain exterior signs for all buildings housing libraries.

2. Interior

Interior identification signs should be installed within each library. They should identify major areas and services such Reference, Periodicals, Microforms. Minor identification signs should mark facilities for handicapped users, floor and stack levels, catalogs, offices, etc.

D. Conditional and Regulatory

Conditional and regulatory signs should include hours and regulations pertaining to eating and smoking. Further regulatory signs may be needed within various libraries or departments within Alderman. Orientation and directional signs should be more visually prominent than signs of a prohibitive nature. Conditional signs should be designed for easy updating. Regulatory signs can be more permanent.

E. Instructional

Informational and instructional material could include point-of-use information displays, posted notices, and handouts about circulation

procedures, equipment use, catalog use, etc. Their design should be graphically consistent with the permanent sign system in order to reinforce the message that library information is being communicated.

F. Current Awareness

Standard guidelines and procedure for conveying current awareness information should be established. Although the information is by its nature variable, the format for presenting it should be consistent with the rest of the sign system and should call attention to its importance.

II. Implementation and Installation

A. Design Consultant

To develop a sign system that will facilitate user orientation and enhance the library environment, the services of a professionally trained consultant with experience in designing sign systems for libraries, museums, hospitals, or similar public buildings are essential. According to John Kupersmith in his article on "The Role of the Design Consultant" in Sign Systems for Libraries (p. 71), "A properly qualified design consultant can offer the specialized skills and state-of-the-art knowledge that are needed to design an effective system of graphics and to transfer that design into reality."

Some university libraries have recently relied on the services of their university planning offices or graphic artists to plan their sign systems. Michael K. Moorman, Architect, University of Virginia Planning Department, advised that there is not a University specialist in the design of library interior signs, and therefore, an outside consultant should be sought. Since bids for fabrication of a system must contain

exact details that the Committee lacks the expertise to prepare, a consultant is a necessity to prevent wasteful specification errors.

Services of the design consultant would include:

1. Studying the buildings and user behavior with the assistance of previously prepared reports of the Committee on Library Orientation
2. Considering the traffic patterns of users, staff, and materials
3. Working with the Committee on requirements for information content and placement
4. Recommending layout, materials, typography, and color
5. Designing permanent signs, permanent signs with changeable features, and temporary signs
6. Writing the specifications necessary for submitting bids for fabrication
7. Recommending materials and machinery for maintenance of the system
8. Preparing a manual explaining the principles of the system and describing each category of sign according to design, placement, and use

The Committee should serve as liaison with the consultant in planning and implementing the system.

B. Installation and Priorities

A sign system for Alderman Library should be given first priority. For many reasons, the need for a sign system is greater in Alderman than

in the other libraries. Alderman Library has the heaviest use, the widest variety of users, and a large number of uninitiated users. It is also the largest and most complex library in the University. Furthermore, financial constraints limit the number of signs which can be installed during this fiscal year. The Committee hopes that decisions regarding reallocation of space within Alderman will be completed soon and can be reflected in the initial phase of sign implementation.

The Committee recommends that the Library actively seek funds on a yearly basis until the unified system is completed. Interim signs in the same format as those installed in Alderman should be placed in the area and branch libraries until they can be replaced by permanent signs. After Alderman, Clemons should be given priority; the signs designed for Clemons by its architect should be graphically consistent with those for the rest of the system. When the sign systems in Alderman and Clemons are complete, priorities for area and branch libraries will be set.

C. In-house facility

An in-house facility should be provided for the production of interim signs for the area and branch libraries, and for future maintenance of the system. Adequate funds for staffing, equipment, and supplies should be provided. A staff position should be designated to maintain the system. Clearly defined procedures for obtaining signs must be established; within this framework, responsibility for editorial control of signs should be assigned.

IV. Conclusion

The Committee on Library Orientation recommends that the Director's Council approve this report quickly; funds for the proposed system which have already been approved must be spent by the end of fiscal year 1981. The implementation of a unified sign system will require time and the effort of the entire library staff. If approval of the system is received, the Committee will continue to seek guidance and suggestions to further its goal. These we consider essential. The Committee would like to thank the library staff who have provided information, suggestions, and encouragement.

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Before the Committee on Library Orientation can recommend an effective system of signs, we have to identify the particular needs of each library. In planning for a sign system, consideration should be given to library resources, special collections, facilities, special needs of certain users, particular hindrances, obstacles, or "points of confusion."

The following checklist covers a wide range of sign system components. Certainly some libraries, particularly the smaller departmental libraries will not require all forms of visual guidance. A few categories under the heading "Exterior Signs" lie outside our jurisdiction. However, they have been included in this list to help us determine if a need for this type of information exists. Additional space is provided below each category for specific needs, comments, and suggestions. Please note the condition and adequacy of any signs which are now being used.

Sign Categories

Direction information to guide and direct people to their destination.

Identification information to label destinations so that people recognize them when they have arrived.

Instruction information to inform people about rules, restrictions, special conditions, and procedures.

Library or Section _____ 20

	now used	needed	
EXTERIOR SIGNS			
Direction	☐	☐	Signs which point the way to major libraries; Alderman, Sci. Tech., Clemons
	☐	☐	Signs directing people to the departmental library once they enter the building
Identification	☐	☐	Building identification signs
	☐	☐	Door signs which identify the departmental library
	☐	☐	Book return shutes- may be closed
Instruction	☐	☐	Signs which describe special conditions or regulations, e.g. "no smoking, no food," hours of the library posted outside the entrance
INTERIOR SIGNS			
Direction	☐	☐	Large signs placed at "decision points" which point the way to main areas of the library, e.g. circulation, stacks
	☐	☐	Minor signs which point the way to facilities, e.g. rest rooms, elevators, stairs, telephones, copy machines

Identification	☐	☐	Large signs marking major areas and service points, e.g. reference room
	☐	☐	Minor signs which identify parts of the collection, general facilities and those for handicapped users, floor and stack levels, catalogs, etc..
Instruction	☐	☐	Signs which briefly explain library procedure, e.g. how to check-out a book
	☐	☐	Signs which explain how to use library catalogs, indexes, microfilm, copy machines, and other library equipment
	☐	☐	Signs specifying rules and regulations, e.g. library hours, "no smoking," reserve regulations, copyright notices